

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

Medical Officer of Health


TO THE

Okehampton District Council,

ACTING AS

The Rural Sanitary Authority.

1897.



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To the Okehampton District Council.

Annual Report of Medical Officer of Health,

1897.

GENTLEMEN,

The conclusion of another year entails on me the duty of submitting to you a report dealing with the various subjects relating to my office as Medical Officer of Health.

The year now past has been a favourable one for your district :—The sickness rate was low, the death rate was also low and there were fewer cases of infectious disease notified than in any previous year, during which the Notification Act has been in force. There has too, I believe, been a steady progress in the general sanitary condition of the district.

Although no public work of magnitude was started in the year, several minor improvements were made in many of the villages. Doubtless much more requires to be done ; but with the people at large becoming more alive to questions concerning the public health we may expect greater progress in the future than in the past. As our knowledge of disease widens so it becomes more and more evident how large a part of it is and should be preventable.

The Area of the District is 114,556 acres.

Vital Statistics.

The population at the Census in 1891 was 14,381. The various " rates " in this report are calculated on the Census population of 1891. As I have previously mentioned in these Annual Reports, the data for correcting our population up to date are too scanty to be at all reliable.

Births—During the year there were 316 births (159 males and 157 females) giving a rate of per 1,000 of 21·9. The rate last year was 22·8.

Deaths.—205 deaths—97 males and 108 females were registered, giving a rate of 14·2 per 1,000. This rate may be looked upon as satisfactory and well below the average, although not so low as the unprecedented rate of last year, viz. 12·5 per 1 000.

The births and deaths of the various sub-registration districts are given on the following table.

Sub Districts.	BIRTHS.					DEATHS.				
	Estimated Populat'n 1897.	Males.	Females.	Total.	Rate per 1,000.	Estimated Populat'n 1897.	Males.	Females.	Total.	Rate per 1,000
Bratton Clovelly	1749	17	17	34	19.4	1749	10	15	25	14.2
Chagford	2621	26	26	52	19.8	2621	28	23	51	19.4
Hatherleigh	3233	41	36	77	23.8	3233	24	19	43	13.3
North Tawton	3783	45	38	83	21.9	3783	22	24	46	12.1
Okehampton	2995	30	40	70	23.3	2995	13	27	40	13.3

From the above table it will be seen that Hatherleigh and Okehampton had the highest birth rates, Chagford and Bratton-Clovelly the lowest. Last year Okehampton had the highest birth-rate and Bratton Clovelly the lowest. Bratton Clovelly generally has a low place as regards its birth-rate.

The lowest death-rate occurred in the North Tawton sub-district, a post of honour which it has not held for several years, Okehampton and Hatherleigh are not far behind. Chagford has by far the highest death-rate, nearly double the rate it had last year. A part of its increase in mortality is attributable to the outbreak of measles in the early part of the year and a part is due to the "ups and downs" met with in dealing with small populations. If we take the mean of the years 1896 and 1897 the death-rate of Chagford sub-district is only 14.6 per 1,000.

Ages at Death.—Rather more than 50 per cent of the deaths occurred in persons over 65 years of age, this proportion is about the average for the district. Chagford was the only sub-district where the proportion was under 50 per cent.

The death of a male aged 101 was registered in the Bratton Clovelly district.

Infantile Death-rate.—There were 36 death in infants under one year of age giving a rate per 1,000 births of 113. This is a great increase on the rate of last year which was only 79 per 1,000. Chagford and Okehampton have the highest infantile death-rate this year ; in the previous year they had the lowest.

Causes of Death.

Zymotic Disease.—As was the case last year, the list is a small one, 6 deaths were due to Measles, and 1 to Erysipelas, giving a rate of .5 per 1,000. Five of the measles deaths occurred in the Chagford sub-district, and 1 in the North Tawton. The Erysipelas death occurred in the Okehampton Sub-district.

It will be noticed that no death was attributed to Enteric Fever, Scarlet Fever, Diphtheria, or Infantile Diarrhœa.

Influenza.—5 deaths were attributed to this disease, 3 in the Okehampton and 2 in the Hatherleigh Sub-districts, This is an increase on 1896 when only 2 deaths were due to this disease.

Cancer.—Caused 11 deaths as compared with 8 and 14 in the two previous years. Okehampton and Chagford have the highest rate. Hatherleigh was the only free district.

Pulmonary Consumption caused 9 deaths, which is rather below the average. The deaths were pretty evenly distributed throughout the Sub-districts.

Heart Disease caused 28 deaths, 14 of which were in the Hatherleigh sub-district. Most of them were in persons past middle age, and were evidently of a senile character.

Bronchitis, Pneumonia, &c.—These diseases caused 33 deaths, 11 of the number being in children under 5 years of age. North Tawton had the highest rate from these diseases and Okehampton the lowest.

Child Birth.—4 deaths were due to Child Birth, 2 in the Chagford Sub district, and 2 in the Hatherleigh. This rate is far above the average.

Injuries.—Only 2 deaths were due to injuries, one from lightning and one from accidental suffocation. Both occurred in Hatherleigh.

Infectious Diseases.

As mentioned at the commencement of this report the year is noteworthy as yielding a very small number of cases of notifiable diseases. The following is the list arranged according to the parishes affected.

	Enteric Fever.	Scarlet Fever.	Diphtheria.	Erysipelas.
Broadwoodkelly ...	0	1	0	0
South Tawton ...	0	0	0	3
Bondleigh ...	0	0	0	1
Sampford Courtenay	0	0	1	1
North Tawton ...	0	0	0	1
Bridestowe ...	0	0	0	1
Okehampton ...	0	5	0	0
Inwardleigh ...	1	0	0	0
Exbourne ...	1	0	0	0
Totals ...	2	6	1	7

Enteric Fever.—Notwithstanding the prevalence of this disease throughout the country, only 2 cases were notified in your district, and one of these (the case at Exbourne), was, as the Medical Attendant informed me, very doubtful in its nature. It was, however, very properly notified, as this disease is often very obscure in its symptoms, and in all cases of doubt it is far safer to treat the case as really one of fever, as no harm is done to the patient and possibly a great deal of good to the community.

The case in Inwardleigh parish occurred in an isolated farm. No history of exposure to infection could be obtained, but it was found that the drinking water of the farm was liable to pollution in heavy rains by the washings of the farmyard. According to our present knowledge of this disease the drinking of impure water is not sufficient to cause it, the specific poison must be present in the form of a living germ. This germ will certainly live for a long period in sewage sodden soil, and it is extremely probable that the isolated cases of Enteric Fever which every now and again crop up may be the outcome of a case on the same spot several years ago. The notification of infectious disease may help us to elucidate this point, but it is necessary for the observations to be carried on for a large number of years.

This disease has certainly diminished in your District during recent years. It is noteworthy that no case occurred in North Tawton during the present year.

Diphtheria.—The solitary case of this disease occurred at a farmhouse in Sampford Courtenay parish in the early part of the year. The case was very mild and the symptoms were so unlike Diphtheria that the Medical Attendant was uncertain. He sent some of the exudation from throat to be examined bacteriologically in London and shortly received the information that the specific bacillus was present. Now that more attention is being given to the minute investigation of throat diseases it has been definitely shown that people who are very little if at all “out of sorts” may yet be harbouring the Diphtheria germ and may give the disease to others and that in a more severe form.

The case was isolated and there was no spread.

Scarlet Fever.—One case was notified early in the year, at Broadwoodkelly. It was the termination of the limited outbreak in that village which occurred at the end of the previous year, and was reported on in last year’s report.

The other 5 cases notified during the year occurred on Dartmoor, three of them were soldiers at the Artillery Camp and 2 of them were children at a cottage on the moor not far from the Camp. It was pretty certain that the disease was brought by the soldiers, for there had been cases in one or two batteries at their previous stations. Legally there was no necessity to notify the military cases, but the surgeon in charge of the camp (Surgeon-Major Johnstone), very kindly gave me notice of the cases and invited me to see the arrangements he had made for isolation, &c., so that the disease should not spread either amongst the military or civilians.

Measles.—This disease was epidemic in Chagford and neighbourhood early in the year. As it was 7 years since the last outbreak in that district there was plenty of susceptible material.

The schools were closed, but I am doubtful whether there is any benefit from doing so in this disease. The children mix in their own homes and so lead to spreading the mischief. So many mothers look upon the disease as one which children are sure to get, and the sooner it is over the better.

In many districts measles is included in the list of notifiable diseases, but I am doubtful whether we should gain much by doing so, at least for the present. Possibly notification might serve as a means of educating the public to the fact that measles is not "a necessity" and that the longer a child is kept from the disease the less chance there is of its taking it at all. The great drawback to the Notification of Measles is that by far the larger proportion of cases are treated by the mothers and no medical man is called in until complications arise, the result would be that we should get very few notification, and those too late for service as regards checking the disease.

Chagford was the only school that it was found necessary to close during the year.

Erysipelas.—7 cases were notified which is about the average. 1 case in South Tawton parish terminated fatally.

I did not hear of any cases of Whooping Cough in the District.

Influenza was present throughout the year, but chiefly in the Spring. It affected mainly the Okehampton and Hatherleigh districts, but the other districts were not free.

As regard the presence of general diseases, apart from the ordinary infectious diseases, there is very little to be said. Acute Rheumatism was not very prevalent, nor was Acute Pneumonia. The former of these diseases is certainly not common in the district, and when it does occur there are generally 3 or 4 cases met with about the same time, and then for a long interval no cases are met with. Both Acute Rheumatism, and Acute Pneumonia are usually attributed to exposure to cold and wet, but in their course they approach more to the Specific Diseases.

Chronic Rheumatism is fairly prevalent and undoubtedly is greatly influenced by climatic conditions.

Public Work.

CHAGFORD.—The water supply has been increased here during the year. There is an ample water supply for the town, but the reservoir shows evidence of leakage. This should be remedied early or the pressure of water will cause much greater damage.

NORTH TAWTON.—Barton Lane Sewer has been re-laid during the year.

The Scheme for supplying this town with a more ample supply of water is dragging along slowly. Gaugings of the springs have been taken at various periods during the year and it has been found that the supply is pretty constant. Although the amount so far obtained is not a large quantity, it is hoped that with the supply already existing, it will prove sufficient for the town. In one of the trenches pipes are already laid, the remainder will be done as soon as there is official sanction.

SOUTH ZEAL, SOUTH TAWTON.—A Local Government Board Enquiry was held here during the Spring of the year on application made by the Authority to borrow money for a water supply for this Village. It was proposed to take water from springs on Darimoor, convey to a reservoir and then supply the Village. As a result of the Enquiry the Local Government Board refused the loan.

Since then the Parish Council has been engaged in trying to devise some plan on a more moderate scale. I accompanied the Council out on one occasion to see what could be done in the matter but no definite conclusion could be arrived at.

Briefly matters stand thus :—A large part of the village is supplied with water from wells, mainly private but two public. The water from one of the public wells is certainly unfit for drinking purposes, the water from the other public well is of fair quality. Parts of the village known as Ramsley and Shilley are practically unsupplied with water fit for drinking purposes, and for these places a supply is absolutely necessary. It was thought that as an extraneous supply would probably be necessary for these portions, the expense would not be much greater if at the same time the whole village was supplied. It is well known that wells sunk in soil, the surroundings of which have been occupied by man for ages, are very likely after a time to supply contaminated water. For this reason, I think, it would be advisable for the whole village to be included in any scheme that is brought forward. Unfortunately, since the stoppage of copper mining some years ago, the village has been on the downgrade, and for this reason the inhabitants are anxious not to embark on any very expensive scheme.

The Parish Council in its last report on the matter suggest that either wells should be sunk or that a competent engineer be called in to advise.

HATHERLEIGH.—The subject of sewage disposal in this town is discussed later in the report.

The water supply has been satisfactory during the past year, and I have had no complaints as to the water tasting of oil from the oil-engine. The Board Schools have been provided with a new flushing cistern, supplied with water from the main.

HIGHAMPTON.—In March I met a Local Committee and the Inspector, to see if some improvement could be made in the sanitary arrangements here, as there was inadequate drainage and the water supply (2 dip wells) was liable to pollution. As a result new sewers were laid and a pump provided.

IDDESLEIGH.—A new pump has been provided in this village.

EXBOURNE.—New flushing arrangements have been made for the school closets.

Pollution of Rivers.—In the spring of the year the Devon County Council sent down a Committee under the chairmanship of Lord Clifford, to see and report upon our shortcoming with respect to the pollution of rivers. I was asked to attend on their tour of inspection.

North Tawton was first visited, and the sewage field and Messrs Shaw's woollen factory were examined. The latter gave satisfaction as regards the arrangements made to prevent the impure waste water from entering the river.

On the whole also the sewage field gave satisfaction, but in one place it was suggested that an embankment should be raised as it was evident that at times inadequately purified sewage could enter the river.

Hatherleigh sewage field was next visited and (as was pointed out in my last year's report) it was found that a large proportion of the sewage passed in an unpurified condition straight into the river.

Okehampton sewage field was the next place visited and on the whole gave satisfaction ; it was recommended however, that a trench and ridge should be provided in the second field similar to those in the first field.

From the above it will be seen that Hatherleigh was the worst offender, and on the receipt of the Committee's Report a meeting of the Parish Council was held on the spot at which the Inspector and myself were present. Mr Hooper, the Inspector, had plans in readiness for dealing with the matter. His scheme consisted of two parts :—(1) the conveying of water from the Buddle springs by a new channel directly into the river, and not into the sewers as at present. By this means the volume of sewage at outfall would be materially diminished ; (2) the distribution of the sewage over a larger area of land.

The Parish Council agreed to these plans of the Inspector, and steps are being taken for carrying them out.

Routine Work of the Year.

REPORT OF MR. HOOPER, SANITARY INSPECTOR.

Notices served	..	..	..	..	..	32
Nuisances abated	..	..	..	..	..	9
New pail closets	..	..	..	..	..	9
New water closets	..	..	..	..	..	11
Houses drained	..	..	..	..	..	21
Pig nuisances abated	..	..	..	..	..	1
New water services	..	..	..	..	..	17
New wells	..	..	..	..	..	2
Houses lime-washed	..	..	..	..	..	7
Certificates for new houses	..	..	..	..	..	6
New sewers laid at Highampton.						
New pumps fixed at Highampton and Iddesleigh.						
New closets (pail principle) at Highampton Schools.						

REPORT OF MR. KNAPMAN, SANITARY INSPECTOR.

Complaints received	..	..	..	..	19
Visits to Bakehouses	..	..	..	..	6
Visits to Slaughter-houses	..	..	..	..	10
New wells sunk	..	..	..	..	5
Houses lime-washed	..	..	..	..	15
House drains repaired	..	..	..	..	6
Earth closets provided	..	..	..	..	6
Water closets repaired	..	..	..	..	4
Animals removed	..	..	..	..	8
Manure removed	..	..	..	..	10
Overcrowding abated	..	..	..	..	1
General nuisances abated	..	..	..	..	46
Certificates for new houses	..	..	..	..	5

Routine of Work by Medical Officer of Health.

During the year all of the larger places and most of the small villages have been visited, and several of them on several occasions. The result of the various inspections made (sometimes house to house), are reported on at your monthly meetings.

Local Committees have been met 7 or 8 times. These I am sure are of great importance, for in addition to their knowledge of local conditions and local wants there is far more interest taken in matters when they are looked at from different stand-points.

Slaughter-houses and Bakehouses.—These have all been inspected by myself during the year, and where lime washing, &c., have been necessary the work has been done with or without notice.

There is still great room for improvement in the way some of the slaughter houses are kept, on the other hand some are always found in an excellent condition.

Water Analysis.—Far more samples were analysed than in any previous year. Some were examined with reference to new public supplies as at North Tawton, South Zeal, and Chagford, some were in connection with newly-erected houses, some on account of their supposed injurious effect. Probably owing to the Typhoid fever outbreaks in various parts of the country, a fair number of samples of water have been sent me to “see if they are alright.” As many of these samples have been sent in dirty bottles of various sizes, with bad corks or even old paper as corks, it is perhaps advisable to point out that for an ordinary analysis at least a quart of water is necessary, and it should be placed in an excessively clean stoppered bottle.

During the year 3 or 4 cases of lead poisoning came under notice, the metal being dissolved from the lead pipe leading down to the wells. The matter was remedied. Cases of lead poisoning are rare in the district, although the large bulk of our water supplies are of a very soft character, and in many cases impregnated with peat. Such waters generally act very readily on lead, and I have found by experiment that a good many of the waters of the district do so act, especially at certain seasons of the year. The obvious remedy for this condition is to prevent the metal coming into contact with the water by using other substitutes as “piping” in the case of wells, and in the case of villages and towns supplied from water mains by having the house connections made with block tin pipes.

Last year it will be remembered that I related two or three cases of contamination of drinking water by zinc, the result of using galvanised pipes.

Although on the whole the District is well supplied with water, in many places sufficient care is not taken to prevent the water being contaminated. This applies not only to the well supply of cottages, but also to some farmhouses. All drainage should be kept at a distance from the well, or the water is sooner or later polluted.

One or two of the smaller villages are not well supplied with water, the great difficulty of adequately supplying them arises from the scattered condition of the houses, and the consequent expense of bringing in water from outside.

Cowsheds and Dairies.—During recent years considerable attention has been given throughout the country to improvements connected with Cowsheds and Dairies. Cases of disease and frequently epidemics have been traced to infected milk supplies.

In many instances in our District there is room for improvement both as regards the amount of cubic space allotted to cowsheds and the manner in which they are drained.

Housing of the Working Classes Act.—Two houses have been condemned under the Acts.

The dilapidated cottage at Bratton Clovelly which has caused us a lot of trouble is at last tenantless, and the occupier consented to remove to the workhouse.

Pig nuisances are far less common than formerly, but nuisances from keeping fowls in small back yards shows an increase in some of the villages.

With regard to the general condition of the District there is great room for improvement in the surroundings of houses. It cannot be too strongly insisted upon that each individual householder has a personal duty to perform, by seeing that his own premises are kept in a clean condition, that his drains are in a satisfactory state, and his water supply kept from all risk of pollution. The time so spent will not be wasted.

In conclusion I have to thank the Inspectors, (Messrs Hooper and Knapman), for much help during the year.

I remain, Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servant,

EDWARD H. YOUNG, M.D., D.P.H.,

Medical Officer of Health.

Okehampton, January 28th, 1898.

Table of DEATHS during the Year 1896, in the Okehampton Rural Sanitary District, classified according to Diseases, Ages, and Localities.

Registration Sub Districts.		MORTALITY FROM ALL CAUSES, AT SUBJOINED AGES.							MORTALITY FROM SUBJOINED CAUSES, DISTINGUISHING DEATHS OF CHILDREN UNDER FIVE YEARS OF AGE.										Total.		
		At all ages	Under 1 year.	1 and under 5.	5 and under 15.	15 and under 25.	25 and under 65.	65 and upwards.	Scarlatina.	Enteric or Typhoid Fever.	Measles.	Whooping Cough.	Diarrhoea & Dysentery.	Phtisis.	Bronchitis, Pneumonia & Pleurisy.	Heart Disease.	Erysipelas.	Injuries.		All other Diseases.	
BRATTON CLOVELLY		25	3	1	0	1	6	14	Under 5	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	3	4
									5 upwds	—	—	—	—	1	2	3	—	—	—	15	21
CHAGFORD.....		51	14	3	1	2	11	20	Under 5	—	5	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	10	17
									5 upwds	—	—	—	—	3	5	2	—	—	—	24	34
HATHERLEIGH		43	3	3	0	1	13	23	Under 5	—	—	—	—	—	3	—	—	—	—	3	6
									5 upwds	—	—	—	—	2	5	14	—	2	14	37	
NORTH TAWTON		46	5	1	4	1	7	28	Under 5	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	5	6
									5 upwds	—	1	—	—	1	8	5	—	—	—	25	40
OKEHAMPTON		40	11	0	0	3	6	20	Under 5	—	—	—	—	—	4	—	—	—	—	7	11
									5 upwds	—	—	—	—	2	2	4	1	—	—	20	29
Totals.....		205	36	8	5	8	43	105	Under 5	—	5	—	—	—	11	—	—	—	—	28	44
									5 upwds	1	1	—	—	9	22	28	1	2	98	161	

Table of POPULATION, BIRTHS, and of NEW CASES OF INFECTIOUS SICKNESS coming to the knowledge of the Medical Officer of Health, during the year 1897, in the Okehampton Rural Sanitary District ; classified according to Diseases, Ages and Localities.

Registration Sub Districts.	POPULATION AT ALL AGES.		Registered Births.	Aged under 5 or over 5.	NEW CASES OF SICKNESS IN EACH LOCALITY COMING TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH.				
	Census 1891	Estimated to middle of 1895.			Scarlatina	Diphth'ria	Enteric or Typhoid Fever.	Puerperal Fever.	Erysipelas
BRATTON CLOVELLY	1749	1749	34	Under 5 5 upwds	— —	— —	— —	— —	— —
CHAGFORD	2621	2621	52	Under 5 5 upwds	— —	— —	— —	— —	— —
HATHERLEIGH.....	3233	3233	77	Under 5 5 upwds	— —	— —	— 1	— —	— —
NORTH TAWTON.....	3783	3783	83	Under 5 5 upwds	— 1	— 1	— 1	— —	— 3
OREHAMPTON	2995	2995	70	Under 5 5 upwds	— 5	— —	— —	— —	1 3
Totals.....	14381	14381	316	Under 5 5 upwds	— 6	— 1	— 2	— —	1 8



